

Nature 291 25 June 1981

## Fredrickson quits without warning

### Washington

To the consternation of the US biomedical research community, Dr Donald Fredrickson announced unexpectedly last Friday that he will be leaving his position as director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on 1 July.

Dr Fredrickson cites "personal" reasons for leaving the world's largest biomedical research organization, referring in particular to the weight of administrative responsibilities and a desire to return to his research in lipoproteins and lipid transport. He has denied any differences of opinion with the new Administration over the funding of biomedical research, although the speed of his departure has inevitably provoked rumours of problems which have yet to surface publicly.

One point of particular frustration to Dr Fredrickson is said to have been the difficulty of making appointments to top positions at NIH at a time when any such decision requires a special exemption from the current freeze in federal hiring. Several senior administrators have recently left NIH, including Dr Robert L. Goldberger, deputy director for science, who has been appointed provost and vice-president for health sciences at Columbia University in New York.

A respected scientist and a popular administrator, Dr Fredrickson first joined NIH 28 years ago, and was appointed their director by President Gerald Ford in 1975. He had previously been director of the National Heart and Lung Institute, and in 1974 became president of the Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences.

Dr Fredrickson is said to have a good working relationship with the new Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mr Richard Schweiker. Mr Schweiker had previously been a keen supporter of NIH as a member of the Senate's Human Resources Committee, and is said to have recently agreed to reconfirm Dr Fredrickson's appointment — just as Mr

Joseph Califano had done when Mr Carter became president in 1977.

If Dr Fredrickson is having problems with other members of the new Administration, then they are being well concealed. The conviction that there must be some unexplained reasons for his rapid departure seems partly an expression of disappointment that a popular director is leaving NIH in the hands of an unknown



*No whisper where next*

successor just when possible budget restrictions could mean a new period of uncertainty. During Dr Fredrickson's tenure at NIH the research budget has increased from \$1,880 to about \$3,500 million, although the rate of expansion has lately slowed considerably.

Last week, in delivering an emotional address to NIH staff at the end of which he announced that he had submitted his resignation to President Reagan, Dr Fredrickson said that NIH were "healthy, strong and in the prime of life", while warning that the essence of the institutes' greatness was "fragile and could be destroyed by careless trustees". He has made no announcement about future plans, apart from telling senior staff that he will spend some months with the National Academy of Sciences. **David Dickson**